

CHAPTER 1.0

PURPOSE AND NEED

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Bitterroot National Forest has proposed specific changes to both existing summer and over-snow motorized/mechanical transport (including bicycles) uses on public access routes (roads and trails), areas, and prohibitions within the non-wilderness portion of the Forest. (Throughout this document, the term “winter” is used interchangeably with “over-snow.” However, over-snow is technically more correct, as the season of winter begins around December 20-21 and ends around March 19-21, while there could be snow covering the ground on the Forest from November until March, depending upon the location). Those changes include allowing access, prohibiting access, restricting access to certain times of the year, and changing the type of vehicle(s) permitted on routes. The Travel Management Planning Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was completed to analyze the physical, biological, social, and economic effects of the proposed changes to the designated system of roads, trails, and areas.

The Bitterroot National Forest's Travel Management Planning Project is in response to the 2005 Travel Management Rule (**36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295: Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use, Final Rule** (*Federal Register* 2005: 70 FR 68264), {Project File folder ‘usfs_direction_and_policies_laws,’ Project File document DIRECTION-003.pdf}. The designation of routes for motor vehicle use is required to comply with the national framework as well as direction specified in the Bitterroot National Forest’s Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). National Forests should provide access for both motorized and nonmotorized users in a manner that is environmentally sustainable over the long term. The National Forest System is not reserved for the exclusive use of any one group, nor must every use be accommodated on every acre; it is entirely appropriate for different areas of National Forests to provide different opportunities for recreation.

The Travel Management Planning Project is proposing changes to both summer and over-snow motorized/mechanical transport (including bicycles) uses. In this document, “summer” also includes the seasons of spring and fall. Direction for summer motorized travel comes from the 2005 Travel Management Rule; direction for winter motorized travel is contained in the settlement agreement negotiated between the Montana Wilderness Association and the United States Forest Service. Litigation brought against the Forest Service regarding management of Montana’s Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) resulted in a settlement agreement in March 2007. According to the terms of the agreement, “The Forest Service agrees to use its good faith best effort to issue travel management decisions (including decisions covering both winter and summer use) for all WSAs by December 31, 2009...” (Montana Wilderness Association, Inc. et al. v. U.S. Forest Service, et al. Appeal No. 01-35690 and 01-35713) {Project File folder ‘public_involvement_pre-nepa_2005-09_2007,’ Project File document PUBLIC-064.pdf}. While not required by the settlement agreement to include winter use outside of WSAs, or by the 2005 Travel Management Rule to include nonmotorized or mechanical transport uses, based on comments received in response to scoping and on the DEIS, the analysis was expanded to include these uses as well. The Travel Management Planning Project’s Responsible Official believes that to undertake a forest-wide travel planning process and to not look at all the various uses on the Forest would be incomplete.

To meet the intent of the settlement agreement, the Responsible Official decided to include over-snow vehicle use in the Travel Management Planning Project so that all suitable areas, routes, and seasons for their operation can be provided as envisioned in the Bitterroot Forest Plan.

For additional information on the settlement agreement, please refer to Chapter 3, Section 3.2.4 B (Over-Snow Use Issue) of the Recreation and Trails section of this document.

Consistent with the travel planning regulations at 36 CFR 212 Subpart B, the resulting available public motorized access routes and areas for summer use would be designated on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM) (36 CFR §212.56), and public use of a motor vehicle other than in accordance with those designations would be prohibited as per 36 CFR §261.13. Areas on National Forest System lands for winter motorized use will be identified on a separate over-snow vehicle use map (OSVUM).

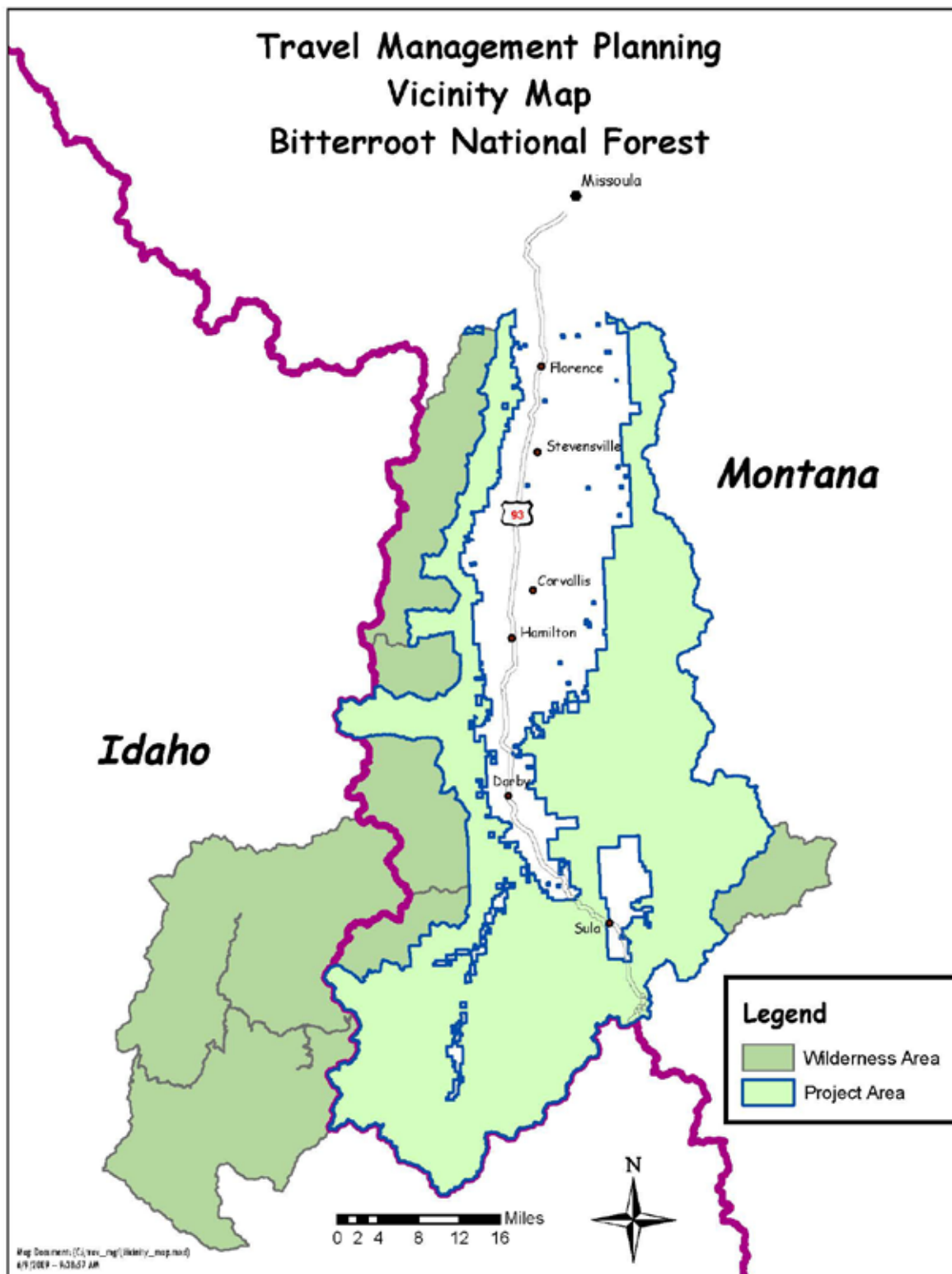
Although the 2005 Travel Management Rule states “At this time, the Department [Forest Service] does not see the need for regulations requiring establishment of a system of routes and areas designated for nonmotorized uses” {Project File folder ‘usfs_direction_and_policies_law,’ Project File document DIRECTION-003.pdf, p. 68272}, the Responsible Official concluded that motorized recreation opportunities on the Bitterroot National Forest could not be assessed without also considering opportunities for nonmotorized recreation. Motorized and nonmotorized recreation experiences are linked in the sense that one affects the other. This is particularly true for the effects of motorized use on nonmotorized user experiences. Providing quality recreation opportunities for both types of users requires the consideration of motorized use within the context of all the full spectrum of uses.

In support of this, the 2005 Travel Management Rule states “Local Forest Service officials may choose to designate routes and areas for nonmotorized uses and enforce those designations with an order issued under 36 CFR part 261, subpart B {Project File folder ‘usfs_direction_and_policies_laws,’ Project File document DIRECTION-003.pdf, p. 68272}.

The Bitterroot National Forest believes such choices and evaluation are best made at the local level, with full involvement of Federal, tribal, State, and local governments, motorized and nonmotorized users, and other interested parties, as provided for in the 2005 Travel Management Rule.

The project area for the Travel Management Planning Project is the portion of the Bitterroot National Forest outside of Designated Wilderness (use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport in Designated Wilderness is prohibited by the Wilderness Act of 1964, and is beyond the scope of the project). The project area totals approximately 850,626 acres. Please refer to Figure 1-1 for a Vicinity Map

Figure 1- 1: Vicinity Map



1.1.1 BACKGROUND

Over the years, the Bitterroot National Forest has developed an extensive system of roads, trails, and areas for public motorized/mechanical transport recreation, which includes highway legal vehicles, off-highway vehicles (OHVs) such as all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), motorcycles, over-snow vehicles, and bicycles.

Currently, there are approximately 2,600 miles of National Forest System roads and trails on the Forest (please refer to the Glossary, Appendix C for definitions). Additionally, there are approximately 748,980 acres available for winter motorized use. The development of this system has been influenced by a number of factors including land ownership patterns, use of forest resources, legislation, recreation demand, and changes in public attitudes.

The system of motor vehicle routes and areas on the Bitterroot National Forest is the culmination of multiple agency decisions over three decades. In 1976, in response to Executive Order 11644, the Bitterroot National Forest developed its first forest-wide travel plan. Updates to this plan were made over the years to incorporate project-specific travel decisions that were based on project monitoring, public comments, and the need to minimize effects on resources. Public motor vehicle use of the majority of this available system continues to be manageable, and is consistent with the current travel management regulation for the Forest, the 2005 Forest Visitor Map. This finding is based on reviews by field-going personnel. Please refer to the Bitterroot National Forest's Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report compiled by the Forest, particularly Invasive Weeds-Item 10; Water and Sediment Yield-Item 17; Cumulative Watershed Effects-Item 19; Riparian Area Condition-Item 22; Road Construction, Mitigation, and Maintenance-Item 24; Off-Highway Vehicle Effects on Lands-Item 28; Recreation Site and Trail Use Effects on Land-Item 29; and Law Enforcement Efforts on the Bitterroot National Forest. Please refer to the {Project File folder 'forest_plan_and_monitoring,' Project File documents FPMON.pdf} for a listing of past monitoring reports. Also, please see {Project File folder 'field_review_notes_trail_reports'} which contains field reports, notes, photographs, and maps. Additionally, please refer to the Trail Condition Surveys, which are available for public viewing at the West Fork Ranger Station. The Forest employs an OHV Ranger during the summer season that is responsible for monitoring conditions on roads and trails, and for taking appropriate action when necessary. Annual reports can be viewed at {Project File folder 'recreation,' Project File documents REC-072, 073, 074, 075, 076, and 078.pdf}.

However, instances where public motorized use is creating problems have been identified, based on public input and Forest Service monitoring, and the criteria for the designation of roads, trails, and areas listed at 36 CFR §212.55 {Project File folder 'usfs_direction_and_laws_policies,' Project File document DIRECTION-003.pdf, p. 68289}. In these cases, changes are proposed to meet travel planning objectives. Please refer to the procedure used by the Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) to screen the roads, trails, and areas where changes were determined to be needed {Project File folder 'process,' Project File document PROCESS-001.pdf}.

The Bitterroot National Forest is experiencing increasing numbers of visitors for recreation purposes, including motorized/mechanical transport and nonmotorized uses. As motorized recreation has become more popular, the following issues have surfaced:

- Conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized uses
- Quality of recreational experience
- Resource considerations

Additionally, the designation of where motorized recreation is permitted on the Forest is confusing. The current travel management map, the Forest Visitor Map published in 2005, identifies road, trail, and area restrictions for motorized vehicles; there are seven different seasonal restriction dates. Furthermore, the map shows both open and closed roads and trails. Adding to the confusion, some user-created /unauthorized routes (a road or trail that is not a forest road or trail or a temporary road or trail and that is not included in a forest transportation atlas) are available for motorized use and some are not, based on

when the route was created. Please refer to Section 1.3.5 (Ensure Consistency with the 2005 Travel Management Rule), below, for additional information. Which routes fall into which category is difficult for users and Forest Service personnel to know because it is often hard to determine when a route was created.

Consequently, it is challenging for both members of the public and Forest Service personnel to easily determine where and when motorized use can legally occur, and what types of vehicles are permitted. This can be frustrating to motorized recreationists, as well as nonmotorized recreationists who would like to know where they can enjoy an experience without encountering motorized users.

In recognition of these issues on national forests throughout the United States, in November 2005 the Forest Service published new implementing regulations for motorized recreation, **36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295: Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use, Final Rule** (*Federal Register* 2005: 70 FR 68264), which replaced the previous regulations. This rule, known as the 2005 Travel Management Rule, acknowledged that “Motor vehicles are a legitimate and appropriate way for people to enjoy their National Forests – in the right places, and with proper management. Current regulations at 36 CFR, part 295, which provide for allowing, restricting, or prohibiting motor vehicle travel, were developed when OHVs [off highway vehicles] were less widely available, less powerful, and less capable than today’s models. The growing popularity and capabilities of OHVs demand new regulations, so that the Forest Service can continue to provide these opportunities while sustaining the health of NFS [National Forest System] lands and resources...However, the magnitude and intensity of motor vehicle use have increased to the point that the intent of E.O. [Executive Order] 11644 and E.O 11989 cannot be met while still allowing unrestricted cross-country travel. Soil erosion, water quality, and wildlife habitat are affected. Some National Forest visitors report that their ability to enjoy quiet recreational experiences is affected by visitors using motor vehicles...The agency must strike an appropriate balance in managing all types of recreational activities. To this end, a designated system of roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use, established with public involvement, will enhance public enjoyment of the National Forests while maintaining other important values and uses on NFS lands” {Project File folder ‘usfs_direction_and_policies_laws’, Project File document DIRECTION-003.pdf. }

The 2005 Travel Management Rule established a consistent framework for motor vehicle use on all National Forest System lands. It also provides opportunities for sustainable motorized recreation, protection of the environment, increased public safety, and reasonable access to the National Forest System.

The 2005 Travel Management Rule requires the designation of those roads, trails, and areas that are open to motorized vehicles, using clear, nationally-standardized symbology, to be displayed on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM). This is a change from the current travel map on the Bitterroot National Forest, the 2005 Forest Visitor Map, which shows open, closed, and seasonally restricted routes. According to the 2005 Travel Management Rule, “...the Department [Forest Service] anticipates that local units will publish new motor vehicle maps annually and update signs as necessary or appropriate” {DIRECTION-003.pdf, p. 68283}. Hopefully, confusion will be eliminated with this project by clearly designating those routes deemed appropriate, desirable, and sustainable for motorized use regardless of their date of origin.

1.2 PROPOSED ACTION

An overview of the Proposed Action is described below; a more complete description is located in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.6 (**Alternative 1**) of this document.

The “original” Proposed Action for the Travel Management Planning Project was described in the Notice of Intent for the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) published in the *Federal Register* on October 1, 2007 {Project File folder ‘news_articles_notices,’ Project File document NEWS-005} and the scoping document (*A Starting Point*) released for public review and comment in September 2007 {Project File documents SCOPING-003.pdf to 009.pdf}. It is also described on page 1-4 of Chapter 1 of the DEIS. Based on public comments received in response to project scoping, additional information gathered by resource specialists during field reviews, and internal ID Team discussion, the “original” Proposed Action

was revised as analyzed in the DEIS; it was described on pages 2-8 and 2-9 in the DEIS. Based on public comments received in response to the DEIS, and internal Forest Service review, a number of changes were made to the **Proposed Action-Revised (Alternative 1)** as described in the DEIS, for the FEIS. Many were applicable to specific roads, trails, and areas mentioned in comments. Others were made in response to comments pertaining to motorized trails leading to Designated Wilderness areas, motorized use in wilderness study areas, and effects of motorized use on roads on trails on water quality and fisheries.

The Bitterroot National Forest proposes the following changes to the existing motorized/mechanical transport public access routes and areas within the non-wilderness portion of the Forest, for both summer and over-snow vehicle use. Please refer to Tables 1-1 and 1-2, respectively, below. The changes include the miles of roads and trails which will be open or closed to motorized use, the types of motorized/mechanical transport use permitted, and the seasons of use. The proposed changes are compared to the existing condition.

Table 1- 1: Alternative 1. Proposed Changes (Summer)

Route Status	Miles
Roads open to highway legal vehicles - yearlong	-41 ¹
Roads open to highway legal vehicles – seasonally ²	-9
Proposed roads open to highway legal vehicles – yearlong ³	0.4
Trails ⁴ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – yearlong	-74
Trails ⁴ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally	9
Proposed trails open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally ⁵	10
Trails open to motorcycles - yearlong	-246
Trails open to motorcycles – seasonally ⁶	43
Change in total miles open to motorized use	-308

¹ (-) indicates decrease

² Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Transportation analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3 C

³ This is a connector between two existing roads which will require separate National Environmental Policy

Act (NEPA) analysis and decision. This will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analysis is completed and the decision is signed

⁴ Most of these trails, open yearlong and seasonally, are roads closed to full size vehicles but open to ATVs and motorcycles; these are known as “coincident routes.” Please refer to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Sections 3.1(Transportation) and 3.2 (Recreation and Trails) for additional information. Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

⁵ These include connectors and a new trail, both of which will require separate NEPA analyses and decision. These will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analyses are completed and the decisions are signed

⁶ Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

Table 1- 2: Alternative 1. Proposed Changes (Over-Snow)

Area Status	Change in Acres
Acres open to snowmobiles – no restrictions	-177,292
Acres open to snowmobiles - seasonally	-7,241
Change in acres open to motorized use	-184,533

The MVUM would designate the following summer motorized access:

Table 1- 3: Alternative 1. Route Status and Number of Miles (Summer)

Route Status	Miles
Roads open to all vehicles ¹ - yearlong	10
Roads open to all vehicles – seasonally ²	67 ³

Route Status	Miles
Roads open to highway legal vehicles - yearlong	846
Roads open to highway legal vehicles – seasonally ²	560 ³
Proposed roads open to highway legal vehicles – yearlong ⁴	0.4
Trails ⁵ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – yearlong	36
Trails ⁵ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally	559
Proposed trails open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally ⁶	10
Trails open to motorcycles - yearlong	84
Trails open to motorcycles – seasonally ⁷	121
Total miles open to motorized use	2,293

¹Includes highway-legal vehicles and unlicensed ATVs and motorcycles

²Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Transportation analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3 C

³Reflects a recent law in Idaho which required a change in the MVUM for Road #468 (Nez Perce Trail) from “Open to Highway Legal Vehicles- Seasonally” (MVUM 4) to “Open to All Vehicles – seasonally” (MVUM - 2). This change was independent of the Travel Management Planning Project. For additional information, please refer to {Project File folder “transportation,” Project File document TRANS-006.pdf}.

⁴This is a connector between two existing roads which will require separate NEPA analysis and decision. This will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analysis is completed and decision is signed

⁵Most of these trails, open yearlong and seasonally, are roads closed to full size vehicles but open to ATV and motorcycles; these are known as “coincident routes.” Please refer to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Sections 3.1(Transportation) and 3.2 (Recreation and Trails) for additional information. Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

⁶These include connectors and a new trail, both of which will require separate NEPA analyses and decisions. These will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analyses are completed and the decisions are signed

⁷Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

The over-snow vehicle use map would designate the following access:

Table 1- 4: Alternative 1. Acres Open to Over-Snow Use

Area Status	Acres
Acres open to over-snow vehicles – no restrictions	522,592
Acres open to over-snow vehicles - seasonally	41,856
Total Acres	564,448

1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The Purpose and Need and objectives of the Travel Planning Project are shown in Table 1 – 5, below:

Table 1- 5: Purpose and Need and Project Objectives

Purpose and Need	Project Objectives
Address conflicts between motorized and non-motorized uses	Change the existing motorized recreation designations to provide quality motorized recreation experiences while protecting natural resources and providing nonmotorized recreation opportunities outside of Designated Wilderness.
Improve the quality of the recreational experience, and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide motorized loop routes that offer a quality recreational experience, with the
Integrate resource considerations into the route	

Purpose and Need	Project Objectives
system	<p>focus on using old roads and linkages with only minor resource impacts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide areas for nonmotorized recreation experiences.• Close routes to motorized use that have resource concerns that cannot reasonably be mitigated.• Close routes that offer little value as a motorized experience and have resource concerns.
Address confusion regarding where and when motorized use can occur and what types of vehicles are allowed	Clarify and simplify the motor vehicle use designations.
Ensure consistency with the 2005 Travel Management Rule	Comply with the 2005 Travel Management Rule, which requires the designation of <u>roads</u> , <u>trails</u> and <u>areas</u> that are open to <u>motor vehicles</u>

1.3.1 ADDRESS CONFLICTS BETWEEN MOTORIZED AND NONMOTORIZED USES

As presented in *A Starting Point* and the Travel Management Planning Project DEIS, the issue of conflict between motorized and nonmotorized uses was interpreted by some members of the public to mean physical confrontation between user groups. Actually, the nature of conflict between motorized and nonmotorized users on the Bitterroot National Forest is more of a philosophical difference rather than physical confrontation; it is about forest users and their personal values, and the fact that personal values shape preferences for which activities are appropriate and desirable on public lands. Therefore, the issue was changed in the FEIS to read: “Address conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized uses.”

The Bitterroot National Forest is comprised of 1,594,417 acres, of which 743,791 acres (47 percent) are in Designated Wilderness. The Wilderness Act of 1964 prohibits the use of motorized equipment and mechanical transport in Designated Wilderness. This fact contributes to the perception of conflict, as motorized users feel they are excluded from 50 percent of the Forest, while nonmotorized users can use the entire Forest for recreation. Some members of the public have commented that the nonmotorized recreation opportunities that wilderness provides are sufficient to meet their needs. However, non-wilderness unroaded lands on the Forest are often adjacent to communities, and therefore more accessible to both motorized and nonmotorized users. Therefore, providing both nonmotorized and motorized recreation opportunities on roadless lands outside of wilderness is appropriate and desirable.

Forest users, both motorized and nonmotorized, utilize these roadless areas for recreation and other purposes. Concerns were expressed by nonmotorized users, including bow hunters, that their recreation experiences are negatively affected by motorized use in areas or on trails closed to motorized use or where the designation is unclear. Nonmotorized users also expressed concerns about trails and areas where both motorized and nonmotorized uses are allowed. Many nonmotorized users feel that areas where “mixed use” is allowed displaces them to other areas because their expectations for a quiet recreation experience cannot be met. The uses-conflict issue arises when nonmotorized recreationists assume that roadless areas will be quiet areas, and they experience the sights and noise associated with motorized activities; this is often a one-way conflict. For example, cross-country or backcountry skiers perceive snowmobilers interfering with their activity, but snowmobilers are generally indifferent to skiers.

As noted in the FEIS, “The roadless areas on the Bitterroot National Forest hold special values for many individuals. These relatively large blocks of wildland are home to wildlife, pure water, native fisheries, outstanding primitive recreation opportunities, beautiful scenery, and unique geologic, historic, and cultural features. This combination of attributes and empty spaces creates a rare and unique setting in a world where

ever-increasing urbanization, population increases, and modification of the natural environment are more the norm.”

1.3.2 IMPROVE QUALITY OF THE RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Concerns were expressed by nonmotorized users recreating in inventoried roadless areas, recommended wilderness areas, and wilderness study areas where motorized/mechanical transport uses are permitted that such uses affects their experience. Motorized users expressed concern about the “inadequate quality of the experience,” in that they want more “time in the saddle,” or longer loop rides.

Quality recreational experience, as it relates to this analysis, refers to how well a road, trail, or area meets the needs, desires, and expectations of the user. The types of uses occurring on a road or trail or in an area affect users’ expectations (motorized or nonmotorized, bicycles, pack and saddle stock, etc.). The resource conditions of the road, trail or area influence the quality of one’s recreation experience. How well a trail is constructed and maintained to meet user-needs is a consideration of quality. Another consideration is how a road or trail or area links with other trails or areas. For example, does a particular road, trail, or area provide a variety of experiences (sights and sounds, vistas, wildlife viewing, etc.) and loops for the user?

1.3.3 INTEGRATE RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS INTO THE ROUTE SYSTEM

Concerns were expressed regarding the effects of motorized/mechanical transport travel on wildlife; water resources; fisheries; soils; invasive plants (noxious weeds); rare plants (threatened, endangered, and sensitive plants); recreation, including socio-economic; wilderness character; and cultural resources.

Based on input from the public in response to scoping and on the DEIS, and from observations in the field from Forest Service personnel, as well as findings published in scientific research, it is acknowledged that motorized use can have detrimental effects to forest resources including soils, fisheries, water resources, noxious weeds, rare (threatened, endangered, and sensitive) plants, wildlife, and cultural resources.

1.3.4 ADDRESS CONFUSION REGARDING WHERE AND WHEN MOTORIZED USE CAN OCCUR AND WHAT TYPES OF VEHICLES ARE ALLOWED

The current travel management map, the 2005 Forest Visitor Map, identifies road, trail, and area restrictions for motorized vehicles; there are seven different seasonal restriction dates. Furthermore, the map shows both open and closed roads and trails. Adding to the confusion, some unauthorized routes are available for motorized use and some are not, based on when the route was created. Which routes fall into which category is difficult for users and Forest Service personnel to know because it is often hard to determine when a route was created.

Consequently, it is challenging for both members of the public and Forest Service personnel to easily determine where and when motorized use can legally occur, and what types of vehicles are permitted. This can be frustrating to motorized recreationists, as well as nonmotorized recreationists who would like to know where they can enjoy an experience without encountering motorized users.

1.3.5 ENSURE CONSISTENCY WITH THE 2005 TRAVEL MANAGEMENT RULE

One requirement of the Rule is “...the identification of roads, trails, and areas that are open to motorized vehicles, using clear, nationally-standardized designations, to be displayed on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM).”

The Purpose and Need for Action for the Travel Management Planning Project reflects a combination of addressing public demands and desires and complying with Forest Plan standards, subject to Executive Order 11644, as amended by E.O. 11989, and the 2005 Travel Management Rule. It is further bound by the consideration of factors and the minimization language for designations of trails and areas.

Executive Order 11644 (1972) requires the Forest Service “...to provide for administrative designation of the specific areas and trails on public lands on which the use of off-road vehicles may be permitted, and areas in which the use of off-road vehicles may not be permitted... .” Additionally, it required that “Areas and trails shall be located to minimize damage to soils, watershed, vegetation, or other resources of the public lands...minimize harassment of wildlife or significant disruption of wildlife habitats...minimize conflicts between off-road vehicle use and other existing or proposed recreational uses of the same or neighboring public lands, and to ensure compatibility of such uses with existing conditions in populated area, taking in to account noise and other factors...” {DIRECTION-005.pdf, Section 3}.

The Bitterroot National Forest originally complied with E.O. 11644 in 1976 when it issued its travel plan map; Section 8 of the E.O. requires the agency to “...monitor the effects of the use of off-road vehicles...[and]... from time to time amend or rescind designations...” The Forest has updated its travel plan numerous times over the last three decades, amending or rescinding designations as monitoring indicated the need. The latest revision of the travel plan occurred in 2005, with errata published in 2007.

While carrying forward the requirements of E.O. 11644, the 2005 Travel Management Rule established two other national requirements. First, all units will use a consistent approach to designations by identifying on a map those routes and areas that are open to motorized wheeled use. Second, once designations are in place, motorized travel off of designated routes and areas will be prohibited, with exceptions for dispersed camping and game retrieval.

On the Bitterroot National Forest, motorized wheeled travel off designated routes, with the exception for access to dispersed campsites, has been prohibited since 2001, when the Tri-State Decision¹ was signed. Therefore, no change is needed for most lands in order to be consistent with the Rule.

The Tri-State Decision also prohibited motorized wheeled travel on unauthorized routes established after the decision, while allowing use on such routes in existence at the time the decision was signed to continue until subsequent decisions were made during travel planning (USDI/USDA Forest Service 2001b).

Unauthorized routes are not engineered or constructed to Forest Service standards. They are often located on steep grades or in boggy areas. Due to the lack of consideration for resource effects during their creation, most unauthorized routes are more prone to erosion and sediment production than system routes. However, the Forest Service cannot expend funds to maintain or improve unauthorized routes; maintenance and improvements are intended to ensure the integrity of travel routes. Consequently, conditions on these routes will continue to deteriorate as erosion creates deeper ruts and exposes more rocks, resulting in resource and safety concerns.

Additionally, motorized wheeled travel for game retrieval has been prohibited on the Bitterroot National Forest since the implementation of the 2001 Tri-State Decision.

During 2006, in response to the 2005 Travel Management Rule, the Forest began reviewing the existing designated system (Forest Transportation System), as well as unauthorized routes, for potential changes. A “core” ID Team, consisting of a wildlife biologist, hydrologist, transportation engineer, recreation program manager, wilderness and trails program manager, GIS/database analyst, and project leader, was organized to conduct the review and to develop a Proposed Action. The “expanded” ID Team included a fisheries

The Off-Highway Vehicle Record of Decision and Plan Amendment for Montana, North Dakota and portions of South Dakota. This decision generally prohibits motorized cross-country travel, with the exception for access for dispersed camping (USDI, USDA Forest Service, 2001b)

biologist, soil scientist, economist, social scientist, botanist, and forest historian. For additional information, please refer to the List of Preparers, Appendix D to the FEIS.

This review considered Forest Plan monitoring and evaluation reports, trail condition surveys, and field reviews, as well as the collective knowledge and experience of Forest personnel, along with the criteria contained in E.O. 11644 and the 2005 Travel Management Rule (36 CFR §212.55).

Forest personnel met with a number of motorized and nonmotorized organizations, State agencies, State and county elected officials, and representatives of Native American tribes. Please refer to Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1 (Public Participation) for additional information.

The members of the motorized and nonmotorized user-groups were encouraged to submit comments regarding travel route designations during scoping, including changes in motorized designations to specific roads and trails they were interested in. They were provided copies of the current Forest Visitor Map (2005), and asked to identify the routes they wanted to be available for their use (e.g., for motorized use) or closed to motorized use. These “marked up” maps were the primary source of information used in developing the Proposed Action. The routes identified on the maps were compiled into lists of existing (National Forest System) routes (road and trails) and unauthorized routes; routes that are not currently part of the Forest’s Transportation System are termed “unauthorized routes.”

As a result of this initial round of public involvement, a number of existing routes where changes may be warranted were identified. After field reviews were conducted, a proposed action (*A Starting Point*) was released to the public for review and comment in September 2007.

As a consequence, the public identified additional routes where changes might be warranted, as well as unauthorized routes they wanted to be designated. Following screening of these “new” routes by the members of the ID Team, and field reviews to look at the “on-the-ground” conditions, the Proposed Action, as presented in *A Starting Point*, was revised as it was analyzed in the DEIS and FEIS. Please refer to Appendix A of *A Starting Point* {Project File folder ‘public_involvement_scoping_09_2007-08_2009,’ Project File document, SCOPING-004.pdf}, and Appendices G (Summary of All Routes Screened During DEIS Preparation) and H (Changes Between DEIS and FEIS) to the FEIS regarding the rationale for why changes were proposed for specific routes (roads and trails), or why not change was needed.

1.4 FOREST PLAN MANAGEMENT AREAS

The Bitterroot National Forest Plan provides direction for managing the land and resources of the Forest through the use of “management areas” (MAs). The Forest is divided into 18 MAs, each with its own goals and standards. These are in addition to the forest-wide management goals, objectives, and standards contained in the Forest Plan.

The following 13 MAs are located in the Bitterroot National Forest’s Travel Management Planning project area: 1, 2, 3a, 3b, 3c, 5, 6, 8a, 8b, 9, 10, 11a, and 11b. A description and listing of the goals of these MAs (USDA Forest Service 1987a, III-1 to III-78) is shown in Table 1-6, below:

Table 1- 6: Forest Plan Management Areas

MA	Management Emphasis
1	<p>Timber Management</p> <p>Description: Occurs east of the Bitterroot River and in the upper reaches of the West and East Forks, between major travel corridors and above big-game winter range.</p> <p>Goals: Emphasize timber management, livestock and big-game forage production, which provide an added benefit of access for roaded dispersed recreation activities and mineral exploration. Assure minimum levels of visual quality, old growth and habitat for other wildlife species.</p>

MA	Management Emphasis
2	<p>Big Game Winter Range</p> <p>Description: Primarily occurring below 6,200 elevations on the lower forested or grassy foothills on both sides of the Bitterroot Valley.</p> <p>Goals: Optimize elk winter range habitat using timber and other vegetation management practices. Access will provide for mineral exploration and roaded dispersed recreation activities. Provide moderate levels of visual quality, old growth, habitat for other wildlife species, and livestock forage.</p>
3a	<p>Timber Management with Viewing</p> <p>Description: Primarily occurring in the visually sensitive foreground and middle-ground viewing areas along U.S. Highway 93, the Skalkaho Highway, the Sleeping Child Road, the East Fork Road, and the West Fork Road. This area provides the road and trail access for most recreation uses on the Forest.</p> <p>Goals: Maintain the partial retention visual quality objective and manage timber. Emphasize roaded dispersed recreation activities, old growth, and big game cover. Provide moderate levels of timber, livestock forage, big game forage, and access for mineral exploration.</p>
3b	<p>Riparian Habitat</p> <p>Description: This area supports abundant and diverse vegetative conditions and the most productive sites on the Forest. Has the highest concentration of resource value on the Forest.</p> <p>Goals: Maintain flora, fauna, water quality, and water-related recreation activities. Emphasize water and soil protection, dispersed recreation, visual quality, and old growth. Provide low levels of timber, livestock forage, and big game forage on fisheries riparian areas, and moderate levels on non-fisheries riparian areas.</p>
3c	<p>Viewing with Timber Management</p> <p>Description: Occurring in visually sensitive foreground and middle-round viewing areas along access routes to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness and adjacent to several developed recreation sites.</p> <p>Goals: Maintain the retention visual quality objective and manage timber. Emphasize dispersed recreation activities that will enhance the use of adjacent developed recreation sites and wilderness, and not degrade old growth, big game cover and fish. Provide low levels of timber harvest, livestock forage, and big game forage. Limit road density as necessary to meet visual objectives but provide access, as needed, for mineral exploration.</p>
5	<p>Semi primitive Recreation Areas and Inventoried Roadless Areas</p> <p>Description: Semi-primitive recreation and elk security areas.</p> <p>Goals: Emphasize motorized and non-motorized semi-primitive recreation activities and elk security.</p>
6	<p>Recommended Additions to Designated Wilderness</p> <p>Description: Recommended additions to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness are 48,305 acres consisting of the mouths of 16 canyons, the upper portions of which are currently in wilderness. Also recommended are 28,500 acres in Blue Joint Creek. This parcel is part of the Blue Joint Wilderness Study Area.</p> <p>Goals: Pending action by Congress, manage to maintain the presently existing wilderness characteristics and potential for inclusion in the wilderness system</p>
8a	<p>Multiple Resources</p> <p>Description: Scattered units of rockland, grassland, meadows, and forested upper subalpine habitat types.</p> <p>Goals: Manage at the minimum level for elk security, old growth, and habitat diversity; but project timber, soil, water, recreation, range and wildlife resources on adjacent management areas.</p>
8b	<p>Big Game Winter Range/Unsuitable Timber Management</p> <p>Description: Grassland and sparsely forested land. The forest lands occur at lower elevation sites where moisture limits regeneration and growth potential</p> <p>Goals: Optimize big-game forage production utilizing habitat improvement practices. Manage to ensure adequate forage for wintering big-game.</p>
9	<p>Research Natural Areas</p> <p>Description: Contains representative forest vegetation and aquatic ecosystems.</p> <p>Goals: Manage to provide for non-manipulative research and observation. Maintain existing roads and trails.</p>
10	<p>Developed Recreation Sites</p> <p>Description: campgrounds, boat launching facilities, picnic areas, and the Lost Trail Ski Area.</p> <p>Goals: Provide developed recreation facilities which are not provided locally by the private sector. Maintain existing sites.</p>

MA	Management Emphasis
11a	Wilderness Corridor Description: The narrow road corridors and a river corridor between the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness on the Idaho portion of the Forest Goals: Manage the road corridors in accordance with the legislative history of the Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980.
11b	National Recreation Trails Description: There are four National Recreation trails on the Bitterroot National Forest. Goals: The trails will provide a day-use or extended trail experience for a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities reasonably accessible to population centers.

1.5 PROJECT-SPECIFIC FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT

Implementing the Travel Management Planning Project **Alternative 1** and the other action alternatives would require a project-specific amendment to the Bitterroot Forest Plan, Wildlife and Fish forest-wide management standard (14) pertaining to elk habitat effectiveness (USDA Forest Service 1987a, II-21).

1.5.1 PROPOSED STANDARD

The project-specific elk habitat effectiveness standard would read, “Existing elk habitat effectiveness will be maintained or improved within the Travel Management Planning project area.”

1.5.2 DISCUSSION

This proposed project-specific amendment recognizes that the elk habitat effectiveness (EHE) standard is not currently being met in 111 third-order drainages across the Bitterroot National Forest. **Alternatives 1 and 4** would bring one or more of these third-order drainages into compliance with the Forest Plan EHE standard, but at least 70 third-order drainages would continue to not meet the EHE standard in all alternatives.

However, despite not complying with the EHE standard in all third-order drainages, the Forest Plan objective of maintaining the current (1987) level of big game hunting opportunities has been achieved and exceeded, the number of hunters, as well as the number of elk, have generally increased, and the general hunting season has remained at five weeks in length. The fact that the Forest continues to meet objectives for elk appears to indicate that existing EHE levels are generally not a limiting factor for elk populations in the Bitterroot drainage.

1.6 PROJECT SCOPE

1.6.1 GEOGRAPHIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE SCOPE

40 CFR §1508.25 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) implementing regulations provides guidance in determining the proper scope of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The geographic scope of the Travel Management Planning Project is described as the Bitterroot National Forest outside of Designated Wilderness.

The administrative scope of the project includes the analysis of the effects of the proposed changes on summer and over-snow motorized/mechanical transport use, and nonmotorized recreation. This will include the Proposed Action (**Alternative 1**), two alternatives to the proposed action (**Alternatives 3 and 4**), and the No Action Alternative (**Alternative 2**) which reflects the current status and administrative activities within the project area. There will be separate analyses for summer and over-snow; each will have alternatives as discussed above.

Three types of effects are considered in the analyses, pursuant to 40 CFR §1508.7 and §1508.8. They are **direct, indirect, and cumulative effects**, which are described in Chapter 3 of this document.

Direct effects are caused by the action, and occur at the same time and place. **Indirect effects** are also caused by the action, but occur later in time or are farther removed in distance. Effects can be both beneficial and detrimental. The direct and indirect effects of the alternatives were analyzed for all resources at issue or as required by law.

Cumulative effects are the impact on the environment resulting from the incremental effect of the action added to **past, present and reasonably foreseeable activities**. **Past activities** are management activities such as timber harvest, prescribed burning, road and trail management, personal use firewood cutting, personal use Christmas Tree harvesting, wildfire suppression, cattle grazing, invasive plants management, special uses/permits, public uses, and activities on State and private land that have occurred in the project area. **Present activities** are activities or projects that are ongoing; **reasonably foreseeable activities** are formal proposals or decisions on activities or projects not yet implemented at the time of this analysis, including those that would recur on an annual basis. Present and reasonably foreseeable activities would occur regardless of which alternative is selected for implementation with the Travel Management Planning Project.

Appendix A to the FEIS contains information on past activities which occurred in the project area; it also contains information on present and reasonably foreseeable activities which are occurring or expected to occur within the project area.

The physical area needed to analyze cumulative effects may differ by resource. For most resources, the cumulative effects analysis area is the same as the project area. Some resources, however, may require analysis areas which are larger or smaller than the project area.

Each resource specialist on the ID Team reviewed the list of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable activities, and analyzed the activities that might influence their resource, within the cumulative effects area appropriate for that resource. Discussion of the effects of the activities and their potential cumulative effects, in conjunction with the Travel Management Planning Project, is presented for each resource analyzed in Chapter 3 of this document.

1.6.2 FEIS ORGANIZATION

The FEIS contains three chapters, and is organized as follows:

- Chapter 1 provides background on the project and describes the Purpose and Need. It also briefly describes the Proposed Action.
- Chapter 2 describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Travel Management Planning Project, including those considered but eliminated from detailed study. It includes a discussion of significant issues “driving” the project, and how alternatives were developed. Chapter 2 includes a description of each alternative considered in detail, and a comparison of these alternatives.
- Chapter 2 is intended to present the alternatives in comparative form, providing a clear basis for choice among options by the Responsible Official and the public
- Chapter 3 summarizes the existing condition of the physical, biological, social, and economic resources in the project area, and discloses the effects of implementing the alternatives on those resources, including cumulative effects. It presents the scientific and analytical basis for the comparison of alternatives presented in Chapter 2.

There are a number of appendices to this FEIS: Past, Present and Reasonably Foreseeable Activities (Appendix A); Literature Cited (Appendix B); Glossary (Appendix C); List of Preparers (Appendix D); List of Recipients (Appendix E); Responses to Comments Received on the DEIS (Appendix F); Summary of Routes Screened During DEIS Preparation (Appendix G); Route Changes Between the DEIS and FEIS-

Summer (Appendix H); All Route Designations (Appendix I); Summary of Changes Between DEIS and FEIS—Over-Snow (Appendix J); Proposed Routes that Have Been Authorized (Appendix K); and Listing of All Proposed Routes Screened During FEIS Preparation (Appendix L).

The Project File contains public comments received in response to project scoping and on the DEIS, references, analytical reports, field notes, maps, and other documents in support of the discussions and analysis contained in the FEIS. References to the Project File will be designated as {Project File folder 'public_involvement_scoping_09_2007-08_2009,' Project File document SCOPE-001.pdf}, for example.

Maps of the alternatives are referenced in Chapter 2 of this document.

1.7 CHANGES BETWEEN DRAFT EIS AND FINAL EIS

- Ø Minor grammatical edits were made to correct typographical errors and improve readability.
- Ø Sections 1.1 (Introduction) and 1.1.1 (Background) were rewritten to improve clarity
- Ø Section 1.2 (Proposed Action) was expanded to include Tables 1-1, 1-2, 1-3, and 1-4
- Ø Section 1.3 (Purpose and Need and Project Objectives): Changed Table 1-1 to Table 1-5
- Ø Table 1-5: Changed the Purpose and Need from “Address conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized users” to “Address conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized uses” in response to comments on the DEIS
- Ø Table 1-5: Removed the underline from the words “nonmotorized recreation opportunities” and added “outside of Designated Wilderness” to the following Project Objective, “Change the existing motorized recreation designations to provide quality motorized recreation experiences while protecting natural resources and providing nonmotorized recreation opportunities outside of Designated Wilderness” in response to comments on the DEIS
- Ø Section 1.4 (Forest Plan Management Areas): Changed Table 1-2 to Table 1-6
- Ø Table 1-6: The heading for Management Area 5 was changed from “Inventoried Roadless Areas” to “Semi primitive Recreation Areas and Inventoried Roadless Areas” in response to comments on the DEIS
- Ø Section 1.6.1 (Geographic and Administrative Scope). The second sentence was edited to read “The geographic scope of the Travel Management Planning Project is described as the Bitterroot National Forest outside of Designated Wilderness” to be consistent with wording in Section 1.1
- Ø Section 1.6.2 (Decisions to be Made) was deleted